

Case 18: Why is the theater curtain still falling apart?

Overview

Students read a short story in which the theater curtain at Dec and Anika’s school will not close. Meanwhile, a social post points to the district’s \$48 million budget. Students label a proposed-budget excerpt by year, stage and units, explain why the post compares a total with a per-pupil figure and map who decides. They then write a budget question and a 60-second comment for the school board.

Before this case

Students should already be able to:

- read a document’s year, stage and units
- divide a total by a count and label the result
- write for a general news audience

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- fact-check the post by matching year, stage and units
- compute \$15,000 per student and label it a proposed figure
- explain what the proposed budget can and cannot show about the curtain
- end with a question readers can bring to the school board

Materials

- This chapter, one copy per participant

Materials, continued

- Evidence A, B and C and the NCES revenue summary
- A label card and the fact-check structure: the claim, what the documents show, what is unknown, where to ask

The task in this edition

Task: Write a fact-check of the viral post for a local news site or a campus newspaper. Correct the comparison, show the math and say what the proposed budget can and cannot tell readers about the curtain.

Students make: Fact-check, 350—450 words, with a worked calculation

Pacing

Opener (page 358): 4 min. Short on time: 3 min. Read What happened aloud and go straight to the key terms.

Key terms (pages 359 and 360): 4 min. Short on time: 2 min. Read the key terms aloud. Skip Who is involved.

Look at the evidence (page 365): 8 min. Short on time: 7 min. Participants fill in only the What it leaves out boxes.

Look at the evidence (page 366): 5 min. Short on time: 4 min. Read Evidence C aloud. Participants fill in only its What it shows box.

Key idea (pages 367 and 368): 12 min. Short on time: 10 min. Skip the In the news section.

Pacing, continued

Sort the evidence (page 369): 8 min. Short on time: skip.

Practice (page 370): 5 min. Short on time: 5 min.

Your task (pages 371 and 372): 12 min. Short on time: 12 min.

Your draft (page 373): 30 min. Short on time: 26 min. Participants draft the two sections in the session and finish afterward.

Check your work (pages 374 and 375): 8 min. Short on time: 3 min. Participants answer the Check your work questions only.

Questions to discuss (pages 376 and 377): 10 min. Short on time: 3 min. Use question 3 as a closing question.

Talk about this case at home (page 378): at home.

Periods: full chapter 106 minutes; one period 75 minutes.

Standards

Quantitative Literacy VALUE Rubric AAC&U’s rubric for calculating, interpreting and explaining numbers in everyday situations. In this case: Students convert a district total to a per-pupil figure and explain why the units in the post do not match (Representation; Interpretation).

Case 18 plan, continued

Standards, continued

Information Literacy VALUE Rubric AAC&U’s rubric for finding, evaluating and using information for a purpose, ethically and legally. In this case: Students check a viral post against the budget excerpt and the NCES page (Evaluate Information and Its Sources Critically).

Written Communication VALUE Rubric AAC&U’s rubric for writing that fits its context and purpose, develops its content and uses sources and evidence. In this case: Students write a fact-check for local readers that shows its evidence (Sources and Evidence).

Information Creation as a Process Information is made through a process, and how it was made affects what it can be trusted for. In this case: Students explain the difference between a proposed budget and an adopted one and why the stage changes what a figure means.

Codes of ethics

- **ASPA Code of Ethics:** 5. Fully Inform and Advise.
- **SPJ Code of Ethics:** Seek Truth and Report It
- **Credo for Ethical Communication:** “We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason...” (one of nine unnumbered principles)

Heat map

- **Opener (page 358):** Low
- **Key terms (pages 359 and 360):** Low
- **Look at the evidence (page 365):** Low
- **Look at the evidence (page 366):** Low
- **Key idea (pages 367 and 368):** Low
- **Sort the evidence (page 369):** Low
- **Practice (page 370):** Low
- **Your task (pages 371 and 372):** Low
- **Your draft (page 373):** Low
- **Check your work (pages 374 and 375):** Low

Try it at your school

Find one line in your school’s budget.

- With a teacher or advisor, find your district’s budget on its website
- Label the document’s year and stage
- Find one line connected to something you use (facilities, arts, technology)
- Ask your student council how students can submit a budget question or comment

Who to ask: Student council advisor, school business office, school board clerk, principal

Safety: Get permission before photographing spaces or people at school. Stick to observed facts when posting about budgets.

Sources

- ABC, “About Abbott Elementary,” No date listed
- National Center for Education Statistics, “Revenue sources for public schools by state, 2022—23 (Digest table 235.20),” No date listed

Case 18: Why is the theater curtain still falling apart?

The district's proposed budget is \$48 million, the school theater curtain won't close, and Dec wants to ask the school board about it.

On your own Read What happened and underline the three dollar amounts. About 4 minutes.



Anika, Dec and Mari test a small light circuit in a theater workshop, with Pauta beside them.

Your role: You're the one who works out the per-student number before anyone repeats the post. **New skill:** Compare numbers on the same scale.

What happened

The curtain in the school theater is torn, and it no longer closes all the way. Dec, 17, pulls that curtain at every show. He and Anika, 16, are on the theater crew. The facilities office gave the theater advisor a quote to replace the curtain: \$6,800.

Mari, 19, is helping them prepare a question for the school board. They find the district's proposed budget for next school year. The total is \$48 million for a projected 3,200 students. One line sets aside \$310,000 for building repairs at all schools. A note says the figures may change before the board adopts the budget.

Your question: What can the \$48 million total tell Dec about the curtain, and what should he ask the school board?

On Tuesday at 6:10 p.m., a post starts going around. It compares the district's \$48 million with another district, Westbrook, at \$21,000 per student. "And they can't fix ONE curtain??" it asks. Dec has a photo of the torn curtain. He wants to be the one who asks the board about it.

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 4 min.

✂ Short on time: 3 min. Read What happened aloud and go straight to the key terms.

💬 Say this

"\$48 million, and the curtain still won't close. What is your first reaction?" — Collect reactions. Then ask what kind of number \$48 million is.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students assume a large total means money is free for any need. **Listen for:** "They have millions, they're just wasting it." **Then:** Ask what the \$48 million has to cover. Write "whole district, next year" on the board.

📄 Support

- Read What happened aloud. List the three dollar amounts on the board with their labels.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Revenue Revenue is money that comes into a government or an organization, such as taxes and grants.

En español: ingresos

In this case: NCES reports that public schools get revenue from federal, state and local sources. That national data cannot show what Dec's district spends on a curtain.

Expenditure An expenditure is money that a government or an organization spends.

En español: gasto

In this case: The \$48 million is a proposed plan for next school year. It lists planned expenditures, but none of that money has been spent yet.

Per-pupil amount A per-pupil amount is a total divided by the number of students, so that districts of different sizes can be compared.

En español: monto por estudiante

In this case: $\$48,000,000 \div 3,200 \text{ students} = \$15,000 \text{ per student}$. Westbrook's \$21,000 is already per student, but its year and stage are unknown.

Who is involved



Mari

Helping the theater crew with a budget question

"Forty-eight million dollars, and the curtain still won't close. Ay, bendito. Before we get mad at the big number, which line is supposed to fix it?"



Dec

Pulls the curtain at every show

"I pull that curtain every show. It doesn't close all the way anymore. That part I can show you."

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 4 min.

✂ Short on time: 2 min. Read the key terms aloud. Skip Who is involved.

💬 Say this

"Has any of the \$48 million been spent yet?" — No. It is a proposed plan. Planned expenditures are not money already spent.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students treat revenue and expenditure as the same. **Listen for:** "Revenue is what they spend." **Then:** Revenue comes in and an expenditure goes out. Draw two arrows on the board.

📖 Support

- Pair students who share a language to explain each term with a number from the case.
- **Cognates:** district (distrito), total (total), proposed (propuesto), student (estudiante), repair (reparación), comparison (comparación), calculate (calcular), federal (federal).

🌡 Heat check

■□□ Low.

🔑 Answer key

Any first guess is fine. Students return to it on the My take page.

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, why do you think the theater curtain is still not fixed?

My first guess is ___, because ___.

➤ My first guess is that the request never reached the board, because the quote went only to the theater advisor.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

This page continues page 359. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 359.

Reading passage

Budget literacy and the politics of a number

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Revenue:** Revenue is money that comes into a government or an organization, such as taxes and grants.
- **Expenditure:** An expenditure is money that a government or an organization spends.
- **Per-pupil amount:** A per-pupil amount is a total divided by the number of students, so that districts of different sizes can be compared.
- **Proposal:** A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet.
- **Decision-maker:** A decision-maker is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice.

The story: A local need and a viral comparison

A high school's stage curtain is torn and no longer closes. Dec, 17, pulls it at every performance. Facilities has priced a replacement at \$6,800. With Anika, 16, and Mari, 19, Dec plans to raise it with the school board, and he insists on asking in person.

The district's proposed budget for next year lists \$48,000,000 for a projected 3,200 students and \$310,000 for building repairs across all schools. It notes that the figures may change before adoption. Then a post circulates on Tuesday evening. It pairs the district's \$48 million with a neighboring district's \$21,000 per student and asks why one curtain cannot be fixed.

The post is persuasive because its underlying grievance is real. The curtain is broken. Its numbers, however, are incommensurable. Mari's response models budget literacy. She reads the labels before reacting to the magnitude. "Proposed" means next year's plan, not this year's spending. The units must be checked. And she asks which line could plausibly fund a curtain at all.

Your role is to work out the per-student number before anyone repeats the post.

Stop and think. Why is a per-pupil figure a measure of resources rather than adequacy?

⌚ Pacing

Reading: about 5 min (729 words). Short on time: read it aloud together, pausing at each Stop and think.

❓ Stop and think

1. **After “The story: A local need and a viral comparison”:** Why is a per-pupil figure a measure of resources rather than adequacy?
2. **After “Commensurability and the chain of decisions”:** How should an advocate handle a viral claim that supports their cause but uses bad numbers?
3. **After “Finance, evidence and professional duty”:** What procedural knowledge does Dec need to turn a grievance into a question the board must answer?

Commensurability and the chain of decisions

Comparisons require commensurable figures, meaning the same year, the same stage and the same unit. A **per-pupil amount** is a total divided by the number of students, so that districts of different sizes can be compared. The district's proposed per-pupil figure is \$15,000, which is \$48,000,000 divided by 3,200. Only after that conversion does a comparison with Westbrook become possible, and it remains incomplete while Westbrook's year and stage are unknown. Even a perfect comparison would measure resources, not adequacy. A per-pupil figure cannot say whether students' needs are met.

The case's vocabulary distinguishes flows from plans. **Revenue** is money that comes into a government or an organization, such as taxes and grants. An **expenditure** is money that a government or an organization spends. The document at hand is a **proposal**, a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet, in Case 4's terms. It is distinct from the adopted budget and from actual spending.

The case also completes a sequence of numerical skills. Case 5 introduced line-by-line reading of a financial document. Case 11 required comparing situations on the same terms. Case 13 required keeping a claim as small as the evidence. Here, Mari applies the first two to the budget, and Dec applies the third to his own evidence. His photo establishes the tear. It says nothing about where funds went, so he declines to speculate.

Case 4's **decision-maker**, the person or group with the power to make a particular choice, locates authority. The school board adopts the budget within state and federal rules, so it, not the principal, is the right audience. An effective question names a line, a need and a procedural moment: which line covers stage equipment, what the \$6,800 request would require and when the board hears requests before adoption.

❓ Stop and think. How should an advocate handle a viral claim that supports their cause but uses bad numbers?

Finance, evidence and professional duty

School revenue combines federal, state and local sources in proportions that vary by state (NCES, May 2024). NCES publishes state-by-state revenue with per-pupil amounts for 2022–23 (NCES Digest table 235.20, March 2026). Those figures give context and cannot stand in for a district's own adopted budget. Local property-tax reliance produces large disparities (NPR, April 18, 2016). The trade-off between local control and equity is itself a policy debate (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, October 10, 2024).

Budgets also change with circumstances. The expiration of federal pandemic relief created a funding cliff for many districts (Chalkbeat, September 13, 2023). By 2026, many districts were cutting programs and staff because of inflation and falling enrollment (Chalkbeat, May 28, 2026).

This page continues page 361. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 361.

Finance, evidence and professional duty, continued

The stakes are measurable. Jackson, Johnson and Persico found that increases in per-pupil spending from school finance reforms raised educational attainment and adult earnings, particularly for low-income students (Quarterly Journal of Economics, October 1, 2015).

Professional codes apply to both sides of Dec's question. ASPA asks public administrators to give governing boards "accurate, honest, comprehensive, and timely information and advice" (ASPA Code of Ethics, 2013). The NCA credo holds "truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason" to be "essential to the integrity of communication" (NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, 2024). The TV connection adds a cultural lens. In Abbott Elementary's pilot, a principal spends money on a sign while teachers need supplies (ABC, December 7, 2021). A TV show cannot settle a real budget, but its question is the case's question: which line, and who decided?

? Stop and think. What procedural knowledge does Dec need to turn a grievance into a question the board must answer?

Sources

Real source | National Center for Education Statistics | May 2024

Public School Revenue Sources (Condition of Education)

Real source | National Center for Education Statistics | March 2026

Revenue sources for public schools by state, 2022–23 (Digest table 235.20)

Real source | NPR | April 18, 2016

Why America's Schools Have A Money Problem

Real source | Lincoln Institute of Land Policy | October 10, 2024

Balancing Act: The Property Tax—School Funding Dilemma

Real source | Chalkbeat | September 13, 2023

Schools face a funding cliff. How bad will the fall be?

Real source | Chalkbeat | May 28, 2026

A financial reckoning is hitting America's public schools

Real source | The Quarterly Journal of Economics (Jackson, Johnson & Persico) | October 1, 2015

The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) | 2013

ASPA Code of Ethics

This page continues page 361. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 361.

Notes

[illegible]

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document and write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Budget excerpt

The proposed budget for next school year

PROPOSED BUDGET, NEXT SCHOOL YEAR. Total proposed budget: \$48,000,000. Projected enrollment: 3,200 students. Facilities, building repairs (all schools): \$310,000. Note: figures are proposed and may change before the board adopts the budget.

Look closely: Circle the year, the stage and the unit for each number.

What it shows

➤ Next year's proposed total and repair line, with a note that figures may change.

What it leaves out

➤ Actual spending, the ranking of repairs and whether stage equipment is in this line.

Evidence B | Social media post

A post shared Tuesday at 6:10 p.m.

Our district: \$48 MILLION. Westbrook: \$21,000 per student. And they can't fix ONE curtain?? Where is the money going?

Look closely: Which number is a total, and which is per student?

What it shows

➤ An angry comparison that mixes a total with a per-student figure.

What it leaves out

➤ A source for Westbrook's \$21,000, its year and stage, and any measure of need.

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 8 min.

✂ Short on time: 7 min. Participants fill in only the What it leaves out boxes.

💬 Say this

“Before you react to any number, find its year, its stage and its unit.” — Model it on the \$48 million: next year, proposed, whole district.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students read the proposed budget as money already spent. **Listen for:** “They spent \$48 million and didn’t fix it.” **Then:** Point to “PROPOSED” and “NEXT SCHOOL YEAR.” Nothing here has been spent.

📚 Support

- Give students a calculator and the budget excerpt with its labels highlighted.
- Read the budget note aloud.
- **Cognates:** district (distrito), total (total), proposed (propuesto), student (estudiante), repair (reparación), comparison (comparación), calculate (calcular), federal (federal).

🔗 Stretch

- Ask why the \$310,000 line cannot show whether the curtain is funded, even though it is the right kind of line.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Repair quote

The facilities quote for a new curtain

Stage curtain replacement, main auditorium: remove the torn curtain, supply and install a flame-retardant replacement. Total: \$6,800.

Look closely: What does the quote confirm, and who received it?

What it shows

➤ The need has a price, \$6,800, from the district's own facilities office.

What it leaves out

➤ Whether the board has seen the request, and which line and ranking apply.

What is still missing from the evidence?

➤ Whether stage equipment falls under the building-repairs line or another one, and how repair requests are ranked. Westbrook's year and stage, and what the board adopts, are also unknown.

Notes

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 5 min.

✂ Short on time: 4 min. Read Evidence C aloud. Participants fill in only its What it shows box.

💬 Say this

"Before you react to any number, find its year, its stage and its unit." — Model it on the \$48 million: next year, proposed, whole district.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students read the proposed budget as money already spent. **Listen for:** "They spent \$48 million and didn't fix it." **Then:** Point to "PROPOSED" and "NEXT SCHOOL YEAR." Nothing here has been spent.

📄 Support

- Give students a calculator and the budget excerpt with its labels highlighted.
- Read the budget note aloud.
- **Cognates:** district (distrito), total (total), proposed (propuesto), student (estudiante), repair (reparación), comparison (comparación), calculate (calcular), federal (federal).

➦ Stretch

- Ask why the \$310,000 line cannot show whether the curtain is funded, even though it is the right kind of line.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Key idea: per-pupil amounts

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 12 minutes.

Before you compare two budget numbers, check three labels: the year, the stage and the unit. An **expenditure** is money that a government or an organization spends. A proposed budget is a plan for expenditures. An adopted budget is the plan the board approves. Actual spending is what the district really spent. The \$48 million is a proposed total for the whole district. The Westbrook figure is an amount per student.

A **per-pupil amount** is a total divided by the number of students, so that districts of different sizes can be compared. Dec's district proposes \$48,000,000 for a projected 3,200 students. That works out to \$15,000 per student. The comparison is still not complete, because Westbrook's budget year and stage are unknown. A per-pupil figure also cannot show whether either district has enough for its students' needs.

Revenue is money that comes into a government or an organization, such as taxes and grants. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that public schools get revenue from federal, state and local sources. The mix differs from state to state. National data like this gives context, but it cannot say what one district spends on a curtain. In most states, an elected local school board adopts the budget within state and federal rules. That is why Dec's question should name one budget line, one need and the board's next chance to hear requests.

Professional standards

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)

ASPA Code of Ethics: 5. Fully Inform and Advise

"Provide accurate, honest, comprehensive, and timely information and advice to elected and appointed officials and governing board members"

In plain words: ASPA members agree to give decision-makers, such as school board members, accurate and complete information.

Question: The \$6,800 curtain quote went to the theater advisor. What should the board see to rank that repair?

Pacing

Full chapter: 12 min.

 Short on time: 10 min. Skip the In the news section.

Say this

"Divide \$48,000,000 by 3,200 students. Compare it with \$21,000. Is the comparison fair yet?" — Not yet. Westbrook's year and stage are unknown.

Watch for

Misconception: Students treat the ASPA code as a law for school boards. **Listen for:** "The board is breaking the ASPA code." **Then:** Say: "ASPA's code is for its members in public service. It is not a law."

Support

- Work the division on the board. Label the answer \$15,000 per student, proposed.

Stretch

- Use the SPJ row: what context would a news story need before comparing the two districts?

Heat check

 Low.

Professional standards, continued**Your answer**

The board needs _____. Without it, _____.

→ The board needs the quote, the photo and the proposed line. Without them, the board cannot weigh the curtain against other repairs.

In the news

Real source | NPR | April 18, 2016

Why America's Schools Have A Money Problem

Explains how local property taxes make school budgets very different from one district to the next.



Real source | Chalkbeat | May 28, 2026

A financial reckoning is hitting America's public schools

Big districts are making cuts, showing how a huge budget can still leave little for extras like a stage curtain.

Notes

This page continues page 367. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 367.

Sort the evidence

On your own Trace the curtain request from the photo to the vote and fill in each box. About 8 minutes.

Trace the curtain request from the photo to the vote. Who ranks it, who adopts the budget, which rules limit them, and where can students speak?

Fund the \$6,800 curtain replacement next year

Who decides

The elected local school board, which adopts the budget
The facilities office, which ranks repair requests (how is still unknown)

Under which rule

State and federal rules and funding streams set limits on district budgets
Proposed building-repairs line: \$310,000 for all schools

Who lives with it

Your way in

➤ A written question or public comment before the budget is adopted

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

➤ Other people who use the auditorium are missing. I would ask how the torn curtain affects their events before the crew speaks for them.

Pacing

Full chapter: 8 min.

✂ Short on time: skip this page.

Say this

“Trace the curtain request. Who ranks it, who adopts the budget and where can students speak?” — Model the first box: the facilities office.

Watch for

Misconception: Students name the principal as the decider. **Listen for:** “Just ask the principal to buy it.”
Then: Point to the chain: the elected school board adopts the budget.

Support

- Let students write the name of each office before writing sentences.

Heat check

■□□ Low.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what the crew should do first, explain why and fix the two marked phrases. About 5 minutes.

A post compares the district's \$48 million total with Westbrook's \$21,000 per student. Someone reposts it and adds "we get way less." What should the crew do first?

- ☐ A Share it. Both figures are in dollars, and the curtain really is torn.
- ☒ B Check that both figures use the same year, budget stage and units before comparing them.
- ☐ C Divide \$48 million by 3,200 students, and post that the district is underfunded.

Why I chose it

➤ B. It checks year, stage and units first. C gets the math right, \$15,000 per student, but no single figure shows whether a district has enough.

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

Our district has a ① \$48 million budget but our theater curtain is ripped and gross. That's so much money and they can't even fix one curtain? It has been like this since before any of us joined the crew and it keeps getting worse every show. Where is all the money going? Other districts get way more. I saw a post that said so. We deserve better and ② the board needs to explain themselves. We are honestly tired of waiting for this.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

➤ Next year's proposed budget is \$48 million for the whole district.

Rewrite phrase 2

➤ Could the board say which line covers the curtain and how repairs are ranked?

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 5 min.

✂ Short on time: 5 min.

💬 Say this

"Someone reposts the comparison with "we get way less." What do you do first?" — Hold a quick vote before any discussion.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students pick C because the math is right. **Listen for:** "\$15,000 is less, so we're underfunded." **Then:** Ask what one per-student figure can prove. It cannot show need.

📖 Support

- Read the three options aloud before students choose.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

➤ Answer key

A revised version: Our question is about next year's proposed budget. The theater curtain is torn at the seam and no longer closes fully; we have a photo and a \$6,800 replacement quote from the facilities office. The proposed budget lists \$310,000 for building repairs across the district. We'd like to know whether stage equipment is covered by that line or a different one, how repair requests are ranked, and when the board considers them. Could a student from the theater crew submit a written request before the budget is adopted? Thank you for considering it.

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Write a fact-check of the viral post for a local news site or a campus newspaper. Correct the comparison, show the math and say what the proposed budget can and cannot tell readers about the curtain.

Use: Case documents: the proposed-budget excerpt, the social post, the \$6,800 repair quote and Dec's and Mari's statements. Real sources: the NCES page on public school revenue sources, NPR's explainer on school funding (April 18, 2016) and Chalkbeat's report on budget cuts (May 28, 2026).

You'll make: Fact-check, 350—450 words, with a worked calculation

Time: 75 minutes

- 1 Label each figure in Evidence A and B with its year, stage and units.
- 2 Calculate $\$48,000,000 \div 3,200$ students and label the result.
- 3 Note what the post leaves out about Westbrook's \$21,000.
- 4 Draft the claim and the unknowns sections on the Your draft page.
- 5 Finish the fact-check, 350 to 450 words, on lined paper or in the online workspace.
- 6 Finish with one question readers can bring to the school board.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Labels for each figure

🔗 \$48,000,000: proposed total, next school year. \$21,000: per student, year and stage not given.

Case 18 | Your task | College educator edition

🕒 Pacing

Full chapter: 12 min.

✂ Short on time: 12 min.

💬 Say this

“A fact-check starts with the claim in the poster’s words. What exactly does the post say?” — Copy the post’s figures onto the board with their units.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Participants call the post false. **Listen for:** “The post is fake.” **Then:** Ask which part is wrong. The figures may be real; the comparison is mismatched.

📄 Support

- Label card: year, stage and units for each figure
- Worked division: $\$48,000,000 \div 3,200$ students
- Fact-check structure: the claim, what the documents show, what is still unknown, where to ask

🔄 Stretch

- Explain the difference between equity and adequacy in two sentences, and say which one the curtain question is about.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

📋 Standards

AAC&U VALUE rubric: Quantitative Literacy VALUE Rubric; Information Literacy VALUE Rubric; Written Communication VALUE Rubric.

ACRL Framework: Information Creation as a Process.

The Case plan sheet gives each code in plain words.

Your task, continued

My calculation

$$\frac{\quad}{\quad} \div \frac{\quad}{\quad} = \frac{\quad}{\quad}$$

➔ $\$48,000,000 \div 3,200 = \$15,000$ per student

Equity and adequacy, in two sentences

- Equity asks whether money is shared fairly given different needs.
- Adequacy asks whether there is enough, which is closer to the curtain question.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

This page continues page 371.

07 Answer key

A strong response:

- Computes $\$48,000,000 \div 3,200 = \$15,000$ per student and labels it a proposed figure
- Notes that the post gives no year or stage for Westbrook's \$21,000 per student
- Explains that the \$310,000 facilities line covers all schools and does not show whether the \$6,800 curtain is funded
- Uses the NCES page only for the point that revenue sources differ by state
- Ends with a question readers can bring to the school board

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

The claim and what the documents show

🔍 The claim: a post going around says the district has “\$48 MILLION” but cannot fix one theater curtain. It compares that total with Westbrook’s \$21,000 per student. What the documents show: the \$48 million is a proposed total for next school year, for the whole district. It is not money already spent. Divided by 3,200 projected students, it equals \$15,000 per student, a proposed figure. The post gives no year or stage for Westbrook’s \$21,000, so the two figures still cannot be compared fairly.

What is unknown and where to ask

🔍 What is still unknown: the proposed budget sets \$310,000 for building repairs at all schools. It does not say whether a stage curtain counts as a building repair. The facilities office priced a replacement at \$6,800 for the theater advisor. Nothing in the budget shows how that request ranks against other repairs. NCES reports that revenue sources differ by state, so national data cannot answer a local question. Where to ask: which budget line covers stage equipment, and when will the board hear requests before it adopts the budget?

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 30 min.

✂ Short on time: 26 min. Participants draft the two sections in the session and finish afterward.

💬 Say this

“Could a reader check each of your numbers? Name the document for each one.” — Partners circle any number without a source.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: The fact-check claims the district is underfunded. **Listen for:** “So we get less than Westbrook.” **Then:** Ask what the post leaves out about Westbrook’s figure.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

🔑 Answer key

What to notice in the sample:

1. Labels the figure’s stage.
2. Labels the per-student result correctly.
3. Notes what the comparison still lacks.
4. Explains what the \$310,000 line cannot show.
5. Ends with a question for the school board.

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Is your calculation correct and labeled as proposed?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Do you note that the post gives no year or stage for Westbrook?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Do you explain what the \$310,000 line cannot show?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Do you end with a question for the school board?	☒ Yes ☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ Uses an unlabeled total.	☐ Uses a figure without year or stage.	☐ Labels year, stage and line and cites the need.	☐ Adds a repair quote and notes what the figures can't show.
Reasoning	☐ Assumes waste or theft.	☐ Compares mismatched numbers.	☐ Links the need to a specific budget line.	☐ Explains process questions: ranking, timing, decision-maker.
Audience & purpose	☐ Accuses the board.	☐ Complains without a request.	☐ Asks a question the board can answer.	☐ Asks a question and offers a concrete way for students to contribute.

Pacing

Full chapter: 8 min.

 Short on time: 3 min. Participants answer the Check your work questions only.

Say this

“Find the sentence in your question that names one budget line and one need.” — Circulate and ask for the label “proposed” if it is missing.

Watch for

Misconception: Revisions only soften the tone. **Listen for:** “I took out the rude part.” **Then:** Point to the Revision row. Ask for an added label or a specific budget line.

Heat check

 Low.

Answer key

How to assess: Score with the case rubric. Add checks that the calculation is correct and labeled, and that the fact-check claims nothing the budget excerpt does not show.

Proficient looks like:

- **Evidence:** Labels year, stage and line and cites the need.
- **Reasoning:** Links the need to a specific budget line.
- **Audience & purpose:** Asks a question the board can answer.
- **Revision:** Adds labels and a specific line.

How your work is scored, continued

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Removes insults only.	☐ Adds labels and a specific line.	☐ Explains how each change makes an answer more likely.

One change I made after feedback

I changed ___ because ___.

Q I labeled \$15,000 as proposed, because my draft called it what the district spends.

Notes

[illegible]

This page continues page 374. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 374.

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames. About 10 minutes.

1 What could make spending rise without the service getting better?

➤ Higher prices for the same work, or new costs the district must cover.
Spending can rise while the curtain stays torn.

2 Dec wants to ask the board himself. Why might it matter who brings the question?

➤ Firsthand users carry credibility and show who is affected. Students also learn how to join decisions about spaces they use.

3 What else would you want to know before saying one district gets less than another?

➤ Matching year, stage and categories, and each district's costs and student needs. Per-pupil figures cannot settle adequacy.

My take

My claim: ____.

➤ Dec should bring the quote, the photo and one question about the repair line to the board.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

➤ The repair quote, because it turns a complaint into a priced need.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

➤ The big total means the district is choosing not to fix the curtain.

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 10 min.

✂ Short on time: 3 min. Use question 3 as a closing question.

💬 Say this

“Answer with a label or a number from the evidence.” —
Ask for one answer per question.

➤ Stretch

- With an adult, find your district's budget, label its year and stage and find one line for a space you use.
- Going further: Write two headlines about the same budget: one with the \$48 million total and one with \$15,000 per student. Compare the story each headline tells. Then name one group that uses the theater but is missing from this discussion.
- Going further: Some people say every school should get the same amount. What problem does that plan assume it is solving? Name one need it might miss.
- Going further: Make a chart of the proposed budget that shows the total, the per-student amount and the building-repairs line. Label the year, the stage and the units. Ask a reader to explain what the chart cannot show.
- Going further: With a teacher or advisor, find your district's budget on its website. Label its year and stage. Find one line for something you use, such as facilities, arts or technology. Ask your student council how students can send a budget question. Get permission before you photograph spaces or people at school.
- Find your own district's adopted budget and locate the facilities or capital line

My take, continued

The limit of the evidence is ____.

- The evidence does not show who ranks repair requests or how.

I would change my mind if ____.

• The facilities office showed that other repairs rank ahead of the curtain for a clear reason.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

This page continues page 376.

Heat check

■ ■ □ Question 3: Medium. Students may compare wealthy and poor districts they know, or talk about family income.

Cool-down: Keep it to the two figures in the case. Ask what we would need to check, and list year, stage, units and need.

Talk about this case at home

Case 18: Why is the theater curtain still falling apart?

In this case, a group of friends reads a school district budget to find out why a torn theater curtain has not been fixed. Your student checked what the numbers mean and wrote a clear question for the school board.

Questions to talk about

- 1 Where do you think a school's money comes from?
- 2 Why can it be misleading to compare a total with an amount per person?
- 3 Who would you ask if something at school needed fixing?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.

Case 18 | Talk about this case at home | College educator edition

🕒 Pacing

At home: this page takes no class time.

💬 Say this

“Read this page at home with someone you trust.” —
Nobody needs to share family money information to complete it.